

Peter Giger
Research Material
2009-07-24

COMPENDIUM 01

This is a compendium of the three most important pages in the performativity namespace in Wikipedia. They were all clipped at 9 am, 2009-07-24. The purpose is mainly to work as research material for me, but they will be available at the Internet Archive for everyone to use.

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Performativity

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Performativity is a concept that is related to speech act theory, to the pragmatics of language, and to the work of J. L. Austin. It accounts for situations where a proposition may constitute or instantiate the object to which it is meant to refer, as in so-called "performative utterances".

The concept of performativity has also been used in science and technology studies and in economic sociology. Andrew Pickering has proposed to shift from a "representational idiom" to a "performative idiom" in the study of science. Michel Callon has proposed to study the performative aspects of economics, i.e. the extent to which economic science plays an important role not only in describing markets and economies, but also in framing them.

Other uses of the notion of performativity in the social sciences include the daily behavior (or performance) of individuals based on social norms or habits. Philosopher and feminist theorist Judith Butler has used the concept of performativity in her analysis of gender development, as well as in her analysis of political speech. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes **Queer Performativity** as an ongoing project for transforming the way we may define - and break - boundaries to identity.

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- 1 Judith Butler's perspective on performativity
 - 1.1 Theoretical ideas
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Judith Butler's perspective on performativity

Theoretical ideas

Judith Butler, the philosopher and feminist theorist who offered a new, more Continental (specifically, Foucauldian) reading of the notion of performativity, which has its roots in linguistics and philosophy of language, describes performativity as "...that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains." (Butler qtd. In *Identity: A reader*, 2000) She has largely used this concept in her analysis of gender development. This idea was first introduced in 1988 in an issue of *Theatre Journal*. (Brickell, 2005)

The concept places emphasis on the manners in which identity is passed or brought to life through discourse. Performative acts are types of authoritative speech. This can only happen and be enforced through the law or norms of the society though. These statements, just by speaking them, carry out a certain action and exhibit a certain level of power. Examples of these types of statements are declarations of

ownership, baptisms, inaugurations, and legal sentences. Something that is key to performativity is repetition. The statements are not singular in nature or use and must be used consistently in order to exert power. (Hall qtd. In *Identity: A reader*, 2000)

Performance theory and gender perspectives

Judith Butler, as mentioned above, has done much research and writing on performance theory, and has focused much of this work on gender performativity. Butler sees gender as an act that has been rehearsed, much like a script, and we, as the actors make this script a reality over and over again by performing these actions. “For Butler, the distinction between the personal and the political or between private and public is itself a fiction designed to support an oppressive status quo: our most personal acts are, in fact, continually being scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideologies.” (Felluga, 2006) Butler sees gender not as an expression of what one is, rather as something that one does. According to Butler’s theory, homosexuality and heterosexuality are not fixed categories. A person is merely in a condition of “doing straightness” or “doing queerness”. (Lloyd, 1999)

Theoretical criticisms

There are several criticisms that have been raised against Butler's concept of performativity. The first is that the theory is individual in nature and doesn't take other factors into consideration. These factors include the space within which the performance occurs, the others involved and how they might see or interpret what they witness. Also, the unplanned effects of the performance act are overlooked and the contingencies are not taken into consideration. (Lloyd, 1999)

Another criticism is that Butler is not clear about the concept of subject. It has been said that in her writings, sometimes the subject only exists tentatively, sometimes they possess a “real” existence and other times are socially active. Also, some observe that the theory might be better suited to literary analysis as opposed to social theory. (Brickell, 2005)

Others criticize Judith Butler for taking ethnomethodological and symbolic interactionist sociological analyses of gender and merely reinventing them in the concept of performativity (Dunn 1997; Green 2007). For example, Green (2007) argues that the work of Kessler and McKenna (1978) and West and Zimmerman (1987) builds directly from Garfinkel (1967) and Goffman (1959) to deconstruct gender into moments of attribution and iteration in a continual social process of "doing" masculinity and femininity in the performative interval. These latter works are premised on the notion that gender does not precede but, rather, follows from practice, instantiated in micro-interaction.

References

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Categories: Pragmatics | Semiotics | Sociological theories | Science and technology studies | Science studies | Feminist philosophy

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Talk:Performativity

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WikiProject Gender Studies / Feminism task force (Rated Start-Class)



This article is part of **WikiProject Gender Studies**. This WikiProject aims to improve the quality of articles dealing with gender studies and to remove systematic gender bias from Wikipedia. If you would like to participate in the project, you can choose to edit this article, or visit the project page for more information.

Start This article has been rated as **Start-Class** on the project's quality scale.



This article is supported by the **Feminism task force**, which deals with feminism articles.

WikiProject Sociology (Rated Start-Class, Mid-importance)



This article is within the scope of **WikiProject Sociology**, a collaborative effort to improve the coverage of Sociology on Wikipedia. If you would like to participate, please visit the project page, where you can join the discussion and see a list of open tasks.

Start This article has been rated as **Start-Class** on the project's quality scale.

Mid This article has been rated as **Mid-importance** on the project's importance scale.

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Discussion

The term performativity goes back to J.L. Austin. It was reinterpreted within the discourse by people like Derrida, Habermas and others. J. Butler´s definition of this term is only one possible reading. It would be good to write a more comprehensive article on this term, since it is a very wideranging one within the field of cultural studies. —The preceding unsigned comment was added by 84.174.41.129 (talk) 13:58, 9 November, 2006 (UTC)

Someone erased a previous version that was actually mentioning Austin. Contributions are welcome,

but unjustified, proto-vandalist removals are questionable. I'll retrieve material from earleir version here:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Performativity&diff=81241788&oldid=81004649> -- Typewritten 23:40, 16 November 2006 (UTC)

Reverting

Actually, reverting to earlier version. Further contributors (esp. 68.49.243.231), please add to earlier work and/or justify and discuss your main edits. Performativity is a quite dense concept and has been used by many scholars -- not anyone's monopoly though. -- Typewritten 23:47, 16 November 2006 (UTC)

I agree with 84.174.41.129 on the need for a more comprehensibe article. References to Butler where there in the earlier version (to her book, not to a reader), now retrieved. More elements about Butler can be picked and pasted from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Performativity&oldid=87353005> -- Typewritten 23:56, 16 November 2006 (UTC)

I think the statement "Butler sees gender not as an expression of what one is, rather as something that one does. In other words, subjects can decide what kind of gender they want to be" is not entirely right. I don't think this is what performativity points to - the statement relies on the notion of a pre-discursive subject who can freely choose their gender. Butler, I think, specifically refutes this idea - & Bodies That Matter concerns itself with correcting this 'mis-reading'. Gender, like sex, can instead be seen as an effect of discourse that both precedes and exceeds the subject. Butler doesn't entirely do away with the notion of agency, but here her thinking becomes quite dense and more difficult, I think.

... I agree - Butler cautions that one should not see performativity as a willful and arbitrary act of putting on gender ... (Bodies that Matter - p. 187)

Butler and others

I added a section on Butler and pasted there all content from pre-revert version. Other sections should be added, especially on Performativity in semiotics and linguistics (this section to point to the performative utterance entry), Performativity in science and technology studies, another on Derrida, another on Deleuze, etc. -- Typewritten 16:35, 18 November 2006 (UTC)

Citation (rhetoric)?

Hello all. This page doesn't look very active, but maybe it has some careful editors floating around? If so, please let me know what the chances of collaborating on an entry on the term 'Citation' might be, used in the rhetorical sense that Butler does. The disambiguation for Citation carries no valence in this sense. I don't have any copies of her works anymore (long story) but I remember it featuring prominently, particularly Bodies that Matter rather than GTrouble. I'm coming from a theatre / performance studies background, so the use is always a little fraught (given the senses JB uses the term). I'm trying to flesh out sections on Brechtian Gestus (which is a semiotic form of mimesis, if that isn't a contradiction in terms; a citational practice might be better). Deleuze (in his second book on Cinema) writes about this too, as have feminist

performance theorists. I need someone better versed in Rhetoric than me to help. Let me know - click here to leave a message on my talk page.

DionysosProteus 01:11, 21 August 2007 (UTC)

Kessler link

The link to Kessler goes to a disambiguation page that doesn't contain an article regarding the Kessler in question. Either someone should write a stub, or the link should be removed, as it serves no purpose.72.78.20.31 (talk) 12:22, 24 March 2008 (UTC)

Complex language

I'm trying to understand this subject but the article is too complicated. It would help to first explain what performativity is, rather than what it is related to. The language needs to be a lot more specific... I'm made unsure when I read things like 'It accounts for situations...' and for someone who isn't already an expert, 'to shift from a "representational idiom" to a "performative idiom" in the study of science.' means nothing! I'm sure it's important, but is maybe best not placed in the introduction. Sorry I can't offer anything but criticism as I don't know enough to correct it myself. —Preceding unsigned comment added by 130.88.84.89 (talk) 15:54, 7 April 2009 (UTC)

I concur whole-heartedly. The introduction to the subject matter discusses who and what it is involved with, but does not define the idea. Then in the second paragraph, talks about how it is used. That is utterly useless. —Preceding unsigned comment added by 128.61.105.188 (talk) 14:36, 16 April 2009 (UTC)

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Categories: Start-Class Gender Studies articles | Start-Class feminism articles | Feminism task force articles | WikiProject Gender Studies articles | Start-Class sociology articles | Mid-importance sociology articles

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(cur) = difference from current version, (prev) = difference from preceding version,

m = minor edit, → = section edit, ← = automatic edit summary

- (cur) (prev) 23:35, 7 November 2008 Zweidinge (talk | contribs) m (7,452 bytes) ("John L. Austin" is more commonly known as J. L. Austin) (undo)
- (cur) (prev) 20:10, 18 August 2008 Dakinijones (talk | contribs) m (7,454 bytes) (Removed category "Feminism"; Quick-adding category "Feminist philosophy" (using HotCat)) (undo)
- (cur) (prev) 05:33, 17 June 2008 Agnaramasi (talk | contribs) (7,443 bytes) (→Theoretical ideas) (undo)
- (cur) (prev) 03:09, 6 June 2008 Yamara (talk | contribs) (7,436 bytes) (undo)
- (cur) (prev) 02:41, 6 June 2008 Yamara (talk | contribs) (7,355 bytes) (whooops) (undo)
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- (cur) (prev) 08:32, 27 April 2008 Eyedubya (talk | contribs) m (7,355 bytes) (→Theoretical criticisms) (undo)
- (cur) (prev) 07:56, 27 April 2008 Eyedubya (talk | contribs) m (7,306 bytes) (undo)
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- (cur) (prev) 17:33, 22 March 2008 Goldintheair (talk | contribs) m (7,172 bytes) (→Performance theory and gender perspectives: her name was linked to BUTLER.) (undo)
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- (cur) (prev) 16:32, 18 November 2006 Typewritten (talk | contribs) (Pasted content on Butler from earlier version (see discussion)) (undo)
- (cur) (prev) 16:26, 18 November 2006 Typewritten (talk | contribs) m (Adding section on Butler) (undo)
- (cur) (prev) 16:23, 18 November 2006 Typewritten (talk | contribs) m (refs added) (undo)
- (cur) (prev) 23:51, 16 November 2006 Typewritten (talk | contribs) m (Reverting to earlier version -- please contribute or discuss, not bulk erasing!) (undo)
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- (cur) (prev) 11:58, 1 October 2006 Bluebot (talk | contribs) (tagged, added uncategorised tag)

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- (cur) (prev)  12:47, 23 June 2006 210.49.219.184 (talk) (undo)
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 - (cur) (prev)  16:09, 16 April 2006 Jaybags (talk | contribs) (Added "gender development" to how Judith Butler uses the term performativity) (undo)
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 - (cur) (prev)  21:53, 23 February 2005 Rbellin (talk | contribs) m (#REDIRECT Performative utterance)

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